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SUBJECT: UNIVERSITY POLITICS: NCP DOMINANCE, ISLAMIST CHALLENGES,
REBEL GROUPS, AND OTHER TRENDS

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In four separate meetings the week of March 9, student political party leaders told emboffs that the National Congress Party is the most organized and successful political party in Sudan's universities. Many opposition contacts cautioned that this NCP dominance is due not to the NCP's platform, but rather to its deep resources, overall student apathy, and a lack of viable alternatives. Contacts emphasized that an unaffiliated Islamist constituency poses a threat to the NCP, as it did in the University of Khartoum's last student elections. Student leaders of the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Darfur rebel leader Abdel Wahid Al-Nur reported that they have been harassed, detained, and tortured for their political activities on campus. END SUMMARY.

NCP STRONG, BUT ISLAMISTS COULD HELP OPPOSITION

¶2. (U) On March 12, the Deputy Secretary General of the National Congress Party Student Association, Sana' Hamid Al-Awad told econoff that of 24 student elections in the last year, the NCP won 19. Al-Awad stated that the most notable losses were in Juba University, the University of Khartoum, and Jazira University. Although an opposition alliance (composed primarily of the SPLM and Umma) defeated the NCP at the University of Khartoum, Al-Awad attributed this loss to rival Islamic groups that convinced some students to break away from the NCP. "Some students think that the NCP is too moderate and migrate to more radical groups," stated Al-Awad. She stated that the two most notable Islamic alternatives to the NCP at the University of Khartoum are "Takfir and Hijra" and "Ansar Al-Sunna" (both of these are generic names for radical - and often violent - Islamist groups). Al-Awad stated that the next scheduled university election is April 15 at Red Sea University, and that NCP campaigning is well underway.

STUDENTS WILL PLAY BIG ROLE IN 2009

¶3. (U) Al-Awad stated that political participation on campus has decreased, but that students are still important for Sudan's political life. Even though political activism is in decline, said Al-Awad, the larger number of universities and students elevate the importance of student politics. She stated that within the last two decades the number of universities in Sudan has jumped from a handful to over 56 today. Al-Awad estimated that approximately 40% of the voters in the 2009 elections will be students or recent graduates. (Note: Although Al-Awad's estimates may be exaggerated, the majority of Sudan's population is under 30. End Note). Al-Awad also stated that energetic students have a multiplier effect on society and will influence their families, neighborhoods, and tribes. Al-Awad predicted that like the ongoing student elections, the NCP will win in the 2009 national mid-term elections.

Nonetheless, Al-Awad said that the NCP would not rule-out an alliance with the SPLM. "We can win on our own, but it might be better for the future of the country and for the prospects of a unified Sudan if we align with the SPLM," said Al-Awad.

NCP ORGANIZATION

14. (U) Al-Awad emphasized that the NCP has the most developed organization and structure of any political group, and a comprehensive social, cultural, intellectual, and political program for its students. She said that the party's leadership recognizes the importance of student politics, as "this generation will be the next leaders of Sudan." Even more important than winning student elections, said Al-Awad, is training young adults in the art of politics. She stated that many NCP student groups collect dues from their members which are later distributed to poor NCP students. She stated that the NCP provides academic tutoring centers for its members. Al-Awad admitted that NCP university party membership can lead to employment opportunities, as the connections that one develops help one find "intermediaries" in the party.

SPLM

15. (U) On March 11, the SPLM Chairman for Youth and Students, Walid Hamid, told econoff that there are over 3,000 SPLM students at 12 universities and higher institutions of learning in Khartoum. Hamid stated that most of these 3,000 students are based at the University of Juba (which is mostly still in Khartoum). Hamid stated that the SPLM has struggled to transform itself from a southern, African party to a diverse national party. Hamid stated that remnants of an SPLM university affiliate, the African National Front (a group that still limits its membership to southerners) has not helped the SPLM's campaign to appeal to diverse ethnic and geographic groups. Hamid stated that he has tried to resolve this problem by establishing a new structure called the SPLM Student

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Coalition. According to Hamid, this body will bring together both the ANF and other, non-ANF, SPLM student groups and should make the SPLM more attractive to interested students. Hamid cautioned that the 2009 elections could bring violence and Sudan could follow the fate of Kenya, given "the NCP's attitude towards CPA implementation."

SLM-NUR

16. (SBU) On March 13, a 27 year-old Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM-Nur) leader of Khartoum University and another 26 year-old leader from Al-Zaim Al-Ansari University (AZA University) told econoff that their SLM political activities on campus have led to multiple detentions, torture, and continued harassment by Sudanese police and security. (Note: Names and contact information of these two SLM-students are available from post via siprnet communications. End Note.)

17. (SBU) These contacts stated that there are approximately 250 students at the University of Khartoum and another 500 students at Zaim Al-Azhari affiliated with SLM-Nur and its related political bureau the United People's Front. These contacts stated that most of the activities of SLM-Nur are underground, though they have occasionally organized rallies and protests, largely in conjunction with international events. The Khartoum U. SLM leader stated that there is a "strong relationship" between the work of the rebels and their student activities. "The rebels are responsible for the revolution," said the Khartoum University SLM leader, "and we respect them and try to support their work."

18. (SBU) Both contacts stated that during their last public event in October 2007, forty SLM-Nur students were imprisoned, interrogated, and tortured. The Khartoum University SLM leader reported that he was detained for 16 days, and the AZA University student leader said he was held for over two months. One of the contacts reported that he was tortured during his detention and subjected to burning, electrical shocks, whipping, and beatings with a barbed stick. (He displayed to econoff several 4 inch scars on his back and circular burn marks on his arm that he said were cigarette

burns.)

¶9. (SBU) These contacts stated that many university professors double as politicians and intelligence officers. "If you are of the same political party as these professors, you may be rewarded with good grades, evaluations, and better opportunities," said one of the contacts. The Khartoum University student leader reported that he had not been able to take his last several exams because the intelligence service consecutively detained him on his test dates. "It is no coincidence that they detain me on my exam days. There is coordination between the University administrators and the security apparatus," he said.

TRENDS

¶10. (SBU) On March 11, Mohamed Yusif the Minister of State for Labor, an SPLM leader, and Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Khartoum told econoff that student politics are not what they used to be. Yusif stated that until 1989 university campuses were a center of political activity. Political rallies and discussions were frequent, crowds gathered to listen to speakers, and walls were plastered with political manifestos and announcements, said Yusif.

¶11. (SBU) Yusif stated that before the NCP came to dominate Sudanese politics, students tended to gravitate either toward the Muslim Brotherhood or the Communist Party. He stated that the debate between these groups was usually open and civil and there was little violence on the campuses. Since 1989, there has been shrinking support for these two political extremes, and more students have become moderate or politically apathetic. According to Yusif, few students today are interested in or knowledgeable about domestic political affairs and many know more about foreign politics than Sudanese politics. Students are disillusioned with their job prospects, preoccupied with personal affairs, and have a low regard for the existing political parties, stated Yusif. Yusif believes that student involvement in politics may rise again, but in a different form. Previous political interest was centered on big ideas, but renewed political participation will be based on implementation of the CPA and what it means in concrete terms, such as power sharing, wealth sharing, free elections, etc. According to Yusif, political activity is most likely to grow among marginalized groups, who may benefit from this new focus of politics.

¶12. (SBU) According to Yusif, membership in the NCP youth wing has been shrinking. In his view, clever, ambitious students join the NCP, because they know it is a route to secure their future after they graduate, not because of ideological appeal. Yusif believes

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this actually discourages recruitment, because present members see new members as potential competitors and want to keep the pool of competition as small as possible.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

¶13. (SBU) Yusif also noted the rising amount of political violence on campus. Although the number of politically active students has decreased, they have become increasingly extreme. In his view, many of these students view the world and politics in black and white terms and have no tolerance for opposing views. Yusif said that political disputes frequently lead to bloodshed and this probably discourages the average student further from becoming involved.

¶14. (SBU) SLM and NCP contacts also commented on the recent March 9 violence at Omdurman Islamic University. The SLM-Nur contacts stated that they participated in the SLM gathering at Omdurman Islamic University. According to them, two NCP students had handguns that they fired into the air provoking their meagerly armed group of SLM students with sticks, knives, and Molotov cocktails. The NCP's Al-Awad had a differing account of the March 9 events, saying that the SLM-Nur group instigated the fighting by promoting their office in Israel, supporting Denmark against the Sudanese boycott, and even publicly insulting the holiest places of Islam. Al-Awad predicted that violence will not spread to other universities, but that "outside forces will try to exploit

universities for their own purposes."

COMMENT

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¶15. (SBU) The NCP's student leader appeared to be the most knowledgeable, articulate, and prepared of all the party representatives and is likely a testament to the NCP's emphasis on developing its new cadre of leaders. The University of Khartoum's student elections provide one example of a strategy (albeit a risky one) that the SPLM and opposition groups could employ in 2009. Opposition groups could attack the NCP's lack of Islamic piety, encourage more stalwart Islamic groups to break away from it, and attempt to fracture the conservative Islamic vote. Undoubtedly the NCP recognizes this vulnerability, and has subsequently attempted to frame itself as the only Islamic party in Sudan. Organizing large anti-Danish cartoon rallies, repeatedly denouncing Israel and SLM-Nur's opening of an office in Tel Aviv, and continuing to use strong inflammatory religious language are just a few recent examples of the NCP's religious propaganda aimed at securing its political base. Yusif's comments about the level of political activity on university campuses, previously considered forces for political change in Sudan (and the source of student activism that brought the current NCP regime to power) are especially intriguing. The NCP obviously recognizes the value of student support in aggressively pursuing university election victories, while simultaneously stomping out alternate political voices. This is another clear sign that the NCP is planning for national elections, and plans to win by any means.

FERNANDEZ